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BOARD OF REGENTS

P.O. Box 3677
Baton Rouge, LA 70821-3677
Phone (225) 342-4253
FAX (225) 342-9318

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Contact: Kevin Hardy

Regents Active-Duty Call-Up Policy, Proposed Overseas Distance Learning Program To Assist Mobilized Students

BATON ROUGE - Louisiana public college and university students called to active duty for possible military action in the Middle East can rest assured that guidelines are in place to assist them in withdrawing from classes and resuming their studies when they return home. A policy by the Board of Regents addresses a wide spectrum of issues pertinent to the military mobilization and activation of Louisiana college and university students who serve in the military reserves and Louisiana National Guard.

"Our students who serve in the military deserve our thanks and support for their sacrifice," said Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie. "One important way the Board of Regents supports those students is through our policy that ensures that these students will be able to pick up where they left off in their educational pursuits when their studies were interrupted by their country's call. As our students are being mobilized we want to remind them that this policy is in place."

Board of Regents policy (Section II-8.2) details notification procedures as well as options for the awarding of academic credit, refund guidelines, the handling of textbooks, student housing, TOPS and other scholarships and financial aid for those who must interrupt their studies because of military service. In addition, the policy outlines re-enrollment procedures.

The active duty policy was originally adopted by the Board of Regents and higher education management boards in 1991. It was revised in 2001 to include the Louisiana Community and Technical College System. The policy can be found on the Regents' website at www.regents.state.la.us (under Board Information). Students who are receiving state or federal financial assistance, including TOPS, and are called up for military duty, are urged to contact their college or university financial aid office for additional information.

In a related Regents development, students called to active duty may even be able to continue their education while stationed abroad. The Board of Regents is currently collaborating U.S. Department

of Defense agencies to make it possible for active-duty students to continue their

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education via the internet. The e-SGR (Electronic Support for Guard and Reserve) program, if approved, would allow currently-enrolled students called to active duty to take the electronically-delivered equivalents of their classes (those available) while deployed in overseas operational theaters. The soldier-students would be able to choose from the wide array of classes available through Louisiana's "electronic campus," which includes some 700+ courses and 13 degree programs provided by institutions throughout Louisiana's public college and university system.

"The e-SGR program is a home-grown solution to a complex issue clearly impacting students who are also members of the Louisiana Reserve, National Guard, and Coast Guard community," said Mike Abbiatti, Board of Regents Associate Commissioner for Information and Learning Technology. "By partnering with military organizations in providing special administrative and academic support systems for students, we can maintain the link between deployed students, and their home institutions. This reduces the level of stress on the student, his or her family, and the partnering organizations by eliminating the need to drop out of school, stop progress toward a degree, and allow the student to re-enter the academic process after the deployment period. Implementation of this program will truly test the much-used term 'anytime/anyplace learning.' Furthermore, the program, as proposed, is unique to Louisiana."

The program was suggested by the chairman of the Louisiana Support of the Guard and Reserve program. A team representing both public and independent postsecondary education and the military community drafted a memorandum of understanding, currently being considered for approval by both the Board of Regents and the Department of Defense.

Although there is no cost associated with the program at this point, a detailed analysis of policies and procedures impacting all civilian and military partners is underway. Deployed students would not see extra fees or other financial requirements.

